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ABSTRACT

The North Carolina 1994 legislative plan to reform the preparation of school administrators involved an application process through which seven universities would be selected to offer the restructured Master of School Administration degree. The continuation of state programs in school administration was dependent on being able to offer the masters' degree. The North Carolina University System General Administration did not approve the application made by the Department of Leadership and Educational Studies at Appalachian State University (ASU). This paper describes how staff and administrators at Appalachian State University (ASA) formulated a strategy to convince the General Assembly that an eighth MSA program was needed and that it should be located at ASU. The actions resulted in 1995 state legislation that allocated an eighth Master of School Administration program at the university. The ASU faculty decided not to challenge the selection process or appeal to the University of North Carolina System General Administration; rather, they asked the state legislation to approve an eighth program at ASU. They stressed the "no-additional-cost" aspect of the program addition and involved a diverse coalition of people most impacted by the decision. (LMI)

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"Retrofitting" The Preparation of School Leaders: The Impact of Legislative Mandates - An Update

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INTRODUCTION

At the 1994 meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, the North Carolina legislative plan to reform the preparation of school administrators was presented (Jenkins, Jenkins, Wilson, 1994). The application procedure was discussed in detail as was the process to be used to select the seven North Carolina Universities which would be authorized to offer the restructured Master of School Administration degree. Since the North Carolina University System General Administration had made the decision that all programs in school administration, including the Doctorate in Educational Leadership, were dependent on the offering of the Master of School Administration, failure to be selected as one of the seven would sound the death knell for all of the university's programs in school administration. In fact, each university applying for approval was required to outline a phase out program for existing programs as a part of the application for the new program. The proposal prepared and presented by the Reich College of Education (RCOE) and the Department of Leadership and Higher Education (now the Department of Leadership and Educational Studies) is described in the paper presented during the 1994 National Council of Professors of Educational Administration conference and reprinted in that Council's third year book (Jenkins, K. D., Jenkins, D. M., & Wilson, H. E. (1995).

As reported in the previously published paper, Appalachian State University was not one of the seven institutions selected to offer the new Master of School Administration Program. The reactions and responses discussed in that article were the beginning of the effort to regain the program. The following discussion outlines the response to the decision by the Department of Leadership and Educational Studies. The result was the successful legislation allocating an eighth Master of School Administration at Appalachian, passed in August, 1995. What might have been a death knell was transformed into a celebration.

IMMEDIATE REACTION

September 1, 1994, was a typical late summer day in the Blue Ridge mountains. The fall semester was in its third week and everybody was settling into the routine typical of all

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colleges and universities. Shortly after lunch, the Chair of the then Department of Leadership and Higher Education, met with the acting-Dean in her office where she informed him that there would be a college-wide faculty meeting at three o'clock so the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs/Provost could share some important information with the faculty. At the meeting, the Provost provided the official word that the University's proposal had not been chosen. He indicated that all impacted faculty positions would be absorbed into other programs. In response to questions as to why our proposal had not been chosen, he indicated that two factors appeared to play a role. First, the proposal was judged to be inadequate and, secondly, geography dictated that a program be selected nearer to the population centers of the northern piedmont section of the state. The meeting was relatively short and the participants left in a state of shock and disbelief. The full implications of the decision were only vaguely apparent at that point.

The following day, the prevailing mood ranged from sadness to resignation. There was a great deal of puzzlement as to what had happened, what had been considered, what was going to happen, and so forth. There was a sense of frustration, a period of trying to assign blame, and an atmosphere of great uncertainty.

A few days later, the written report was received. In many respects, the report caused even more confusion and disbelief. The Appalachian proposal had been ranked eighth of the twelve proposals. For reasons beyond the scope of this paper, North Carolina State was removed from the proposal ranking. This made the Appalachian proposal seventh on the list with seven to be approved. Instead, the University System bypassed the Appalachian proposal to approve the proposal from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro which had been ninth on the original list and eighth on the revised list. The explanation was that the northern piedmont area needed a program. The distribution of the seven programs was three in the eastern third of the state, three in the central third of the state, and one in the western third of the state. In North Carolina, Interstate 77 serves to bisect the state on a north-south axis. Six of the programs approved were east of I-77, and one was located west of this dividing line.

The review of the above information led to a growing realization that the decision was primarily political, not educational, and certainly not geographical. There was an increasing feeling that the decision should be challenged. Faculty discussions then turned to how the decision might be reversed.

It is interesting to note that in discussions with faculty at sister institutions, there was an expression of surprise and disbelief that the Appalachian proposal had not been approved. In most cases, it was indicated that we were considered to have a strong

program and were expected to be selected for the new MSA degree. But, while expressing condolences on our not being selected, there was a sense of relief evident from those at the selected institutions which had been approved and an understandable attitude of "glad it's not me."

Once the program faculty determined to challenge the decision, it was important that "what is possible" be explored. For most of the faculty involved, this was uncharted territory. They were not deeply versed in challenging the authority of the North Carolina University System. It was important that a positive, effective approach be developed and implemented.

THE STRATEGY

After much discussion, the following main elements of strategy were agreed upon:

1) **Not to challenge the selection process.**

   While there seemed to be a number of points on which the evaluation/ selection process could be questioned and perhaps challenged, this would have pitted Appalachian against the other schools which had been selected. It would also have delayed the implementation of the new Master of School Administration across the state. The ill will created, even if we were unsuccessful in changing the decision, would have long range consequences to the Department, the College, and the University. We certainly did not want to create enemies out of our colleagues.

2) **Not to appeal the decision to the University of North Carolina System General Administration.**

   This decision was based on similar considerations as those outlined above. Since the Legislature had authorized seven programs, to answer our appeal affirmatively, the General Administration would have to transfer one of the programs approved from one of the other institutions. Needless to say, this would have created a negative climate for everyone, which would exist for an extended period of time.

3) **Focus on the Legislature.**

   The North Carolina General Assembly initiated the process by legislation reducing preparation programs for school administrators to seven statewide. While they delegated the selection of the seven programs to the University System General Administration, the cap of seven programs was fixed by legislation. Only the General Assembly could increase the number of programs.

4) **Ask for Legislative approval of the eighth program designated for Appalachian**

State University.

This strategy posed no threat for the seven already approved programs. Because of the "glad it's not me" syndrome, it would be unlikely that the personnel of the selected programs would become involved in either supporting or opposing this initiative. While several of the other non-selected Universities were disappointed at not being selected, there appeared to be no other organized effort which could "muddy the waters."

5) **Stress the "no additional cost" aspect of the approval of an additional program at Appalachian State University.**

Since a strong program was already in place at Appalachian, there would be almost no additional cost to approve a program at the University. Cost is always a consideration as members of the General Assembly consider new or expanded programs. In this case, not only would there be little or no new costs, the State would lose what they had already invested in a successful program over the years. There had already been substantial investment in the Master, Specialist, and Doctoral degree programs.

6) **Involve those most impacted by the decision to discontinue the school administrative preparation program at Appalachian State University.**

To be successful, the effort had to be broad based, involving those who would be negatively impacted by the decision to discontinue the program at Appalachian, whose historic mission had always been to serve the higher education needs of Northwest North Carolina. School districts, boards of education, superintendents, principals, teachers, alumni, graduate students, and elected officials in Northwest North Carolina all had vital interests in seeing that the programs were reinstated. Had the process to gain approval of an eighth program come from only the University faculty, it would have likely been dismissed out-of-hand as a self-serving effort by a bunch of whining professors trying to save their jobs. It was absolutely essential that the effort include the widest range of people possible.

Reduced to the simplest elements, the strategy was designed to convince the General Assembly of the need for an eighth Master of School Administration program, and to locate it at Appalachian.

It is important to note that those most impacted by the decision to discontinue the school administration programs at Appalachian were from Northwestern North Carolina. Northwestern North Carolina has traditionally been the most Republican area of the state. With the change in control of the House of Representatives to the Republicans (the first time since the Reconstruction), this section of the state gained influence in the

North Carolina General Assembly. This was a positive factor in the effort to convince the legislature to restore the program. On the other hand, it made any coalition with the other discontinued universities, all of which were located in the more Democratic eastern part of the state, almost impossible.

THE OPERATIONAL PLAN

The reaction off campus was, to a large extent, a mirror image of that of the faculty in the Department and the College. Phone calls, visits, and letters flooded the Department. The theme was the same -- disbelief and shock. Why? What happened? Where will new administrators come from? Friends and associates at other universities called to express their regrets and disbelief. Over and over, they expressed the thought that, because of our excellent reputation in preparing school administrators, they had considered Appalachian as a top con' der for the new program.

The students in Appalachian's recently established (1992) doctoral program in Educational Leadership were especially distraught. The University System General Administration had decreed that failure to approve a university's Master of School Administration proposal would mean that all school administration programs would be phased out. Those students in Appalachian's first three doctoral cohorts seemed at one and the same time to be in the last three cohorts.

Discussions began on how to proceed. The politics of any solution posed intriguing circumstances and possible concerns. Understanding this, the Chair of the Department met with faculty to announce his intentions to work for the authorization of the Master of School Administration program at Appalachian. The strategy of working for the eighth program was outlined and discussed. Since the effort to gain approval of the program would inevitably be controversial, the Chair offered to step down from the chair position to avoid any negative effects on the Department. The members of the Department overwhelmingly rejected his offer.

The effort to secure a Master of School Administration began in earnest at that point. As calls about the program were received, it was suggested that the caller contact his or her legislative representative and/or senator to express concern and to ask for an eighth program at Appalachian. The Chair and other members of the Department met with various public school administrators as individuals and at administrative meetings to answer questions, provide updates, and to urge contacts with the General Assembly. Doctoral students expressing concerns were also asked to make legislative contacts. The level of concern by these individuals and groups was reflected in the significant number of contacts actually made with legislators. In many cases, copies of letters, fax

messages, and other contacts were shared with the Department.

The Chair met with one of the state senators representing the northwest area of the state. Although she expressed concern and promised her support, she was not too hopeful for a positive outcome. However, she did support the bill when it was presented in the State Senate.

Current students also played a key role in helping to make an eighth program a reality. The Department offers a course, Politics in Administration, each fall semester. The Fall, 1994, class had 34 members. The course requires participation in the We Care Conference sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators in Washington, D.C. While there, the students shared ideas and discussed efforts to get the Master of School Administration approved for Appalachian. The group elected to take this challenge on as an informal project. Since the membership of the class was widely spread over Western North Carolina, a significant number of legislators of both parties were contacted. The Chair of the North Carolina House of Representatives Budget Committee reported receiving letters from nineteen different counties.

Contacts continued to be made with a number of other governmental leaders including the Governor, Congressmen, United States Senators, as well as legislative leaders in the North Carolina House and Senate. The commitment to concentrate on a grassroots effort by those impacted by the decision produced a strong response somewhat unique in the legislative history of the state. It was absolutely unique in the history of the Department.

PROBLEMS

As with any major effort, especially a new venture, there were major problems to be overcome. Not least of these was the almost total lack of experience in these matters by the majority of the Department members. For the most part, they were supportive, but lacked the experience to be active in the effort. A few did have political knowledge and understandings which were helpful. The bulk of the effort fell on two faculty members who had the knowledge, contacts, and experience needed for a successful effort.

Early in the effort, the Chair and the Coordinator of the School Administration Program scheduled an appointment with the Chancellor of the University to explain the Department's efforts and to solicit his support. To our surprise, he reported that he was under orders from the President of the University System not to make any effort to have the program restored to Appalachian. Thus, he could not become involved in our effort. He questioned whether our planned efforts were a violation of this direct order. After an

intense discussion, he indicated he wanted to consider the matter and would meet with us again.

About a week later, the Chair and the Coordinator were summoned to a breakfast meeting with the Chancellor. When they arrived, the Acting Dean of the College of Education, the Dean of the Graduate School, and the Director of the Doctoral Program were also in attendance. The Chancellor, after reviewing the constraints he was under, ordered the Chair to cease any efforts to get the program back or resign his position as Chair of the Department of Leadership and Educational Studies. The Chair, after some discussion, declined to cease efforts to regain the lost programs and also declined to resign as Chair. While the Chancellor expressed interest in having the programs restored, he felt he could not play an active role. He could not be a public advocate for the return of the school administration program. He indicated he would respond positively to private contacts or questions but would refuse to be quoted publicly. The Chancellor, although not able to play a public role in support of the effort to regain the school administration programs, did not impede the effort. In subtle ways he expressed the need to have the programs returned. At his direction, the University's legislative liaison may have quietly helped the bill along.

It was very clear the Department was on its own with no official sanction or support. In addition, the Department could not count on the support of the University System lobbyists in the General Assembly. The best to be hoped for was a neutral position, but even that was not assured. The inability of the Chancellor to take a public stand in support of the return of the programs created a negative factor in working with administrators in the area served by the University. The question of the Chancellor's support was raised at almost every meeting with individual administrators and at formal and informal meetings. They wanted to know where the Chancellor stood and what he was doing to get the program back. It still appears to color some attitudes about the University.

The third problem had to do with the legislature itself. The November, 1994, elections produced a revolution in the control of that legislature. For the first time since the Reconstruction, the Republicans were a majority in the House of Representatives and were within two members of controlling the Senate. This led to a significant shift in leadership. Many of the new majority in the House were first time members, including several of the new General Assembly members from the immediate area of Appalachian. In an institution where party affiliation and seniority are the "be all and end all", former leaders probably had minimal influence in the legislative process. This meant the leadership necessary to get an eighth program approved would have to come from representatives and senators from other geographical areas. Fortunately, there were

also a number of Appalachian alumni in the General Assembly. The leadership for this particular legislative effort came from among this group of Appalachian alumni.

One of the most effective advocates for the approval of an eighth Master of School Administration program was alumnus George Holmes who served as the Co-Chair of The House of Representatives Budget Committee. His leadership and persistence was the key to getting the necessary provisions attached to the bi-annual budget bill and restoring it to the bill in Conference Committee after the Senate removed it. Rumor has it that it was the last item agreed to by the Conference Committee after an impassioned plea by Representative Holmes.

In some respects, this change in the composition of the General Assembly eased the problem of obtaining the approval of the eighth Master of School Administration program and its assignment to Appalachian. The Democratic leadership team which designed and passed the original legislation establishing the new Master of School Administration and limiting it to seven institutions was no longer in power. The vested interest they had in the original legislation was not a major factor to overcome in the effort to gain approval for the restoration of the program. Had the Democrats retained the leadership in the House of Representatives, the effort to gain approval for an eighth program would have been problematic.

Another problem to overcome was the lack of an established power base and structure which could be utilized in the effort to influence the legislature. As a result, it was difficult to coordinate the efforts of the many different groups and individuals. There was no access to a knowledgeable lobbyist who could monitor and direct the effort at the General Assembly. The strength of true grassroots efforts were at least partially muted by the lack of ability to focus it in the General Assembly.

THE RESULTS

Midsummer, 1995, the Chair received information that the authorization of a Master of School Administration Program at Appalachian had been attached as an amendment to the budget bill being considered by the House Budget Committee. The budget was passed by the House and sent to the Senate. The Senate failed to pass the House version of the budget and stripped out some amendments including the program approval. The budget was sent to a Conference Committee. One of the last acts of the Conference Committee was to add back the amendment dealing with the program approval. The Budget Bill containing the amendment then passed both Houses and was signed into law by the Governor.

In early August, 1995, the long, difficult effort to have the Master of School Administration program approved for Appalachian came to a successful conclusion. As a result, all school administration programs offered by the University, including its only doctorate, could be reinstated and continued. The approval came too late to implement the program for the 1995-96 academic year. The newly approved program will be implemented at the beginning of the 1996-97 academic year.

OUTCOMES

While there was a great deal of joy and happiness with the return of the School Administration programs, there were a number of changes to be made. The Master's program approved by the General Assembly was not the same as the existing program. New courses had to be designed and taken through the required University approval process to fully implement the newly established Master of School Administration program. Recruiting efforts for the new program had to be implemented. The Educational Specialist program is being redesigned as a result of the restructuring of the Master's program.

In addition, students in the existing Master's and Educational Specialist programs must be phased out no later than Spring Semester, 1998. The new and old programs will parallel for two years. This will cause some impact on the resources of the Department. The resulting small class sizes will have a negative impact at a university principally driven by FTE and student credit hours.

The use of a General Assembly mandate to restore the School Administration programs at Appalachian has created a sensitive environment for the Department. While the University General Administration did not actively support or oppose the legislation, they had directed the Chancellor at Appalachian not to try to get the program reapproved. The Appalachian administration has been very supportive of the reestablishment of the program. However, the success of the program will be under close scrutiny for an extended period of time.

REFLECTIONS

Departments and department personnel must become more sensitive and alert to changing interests and concerns of legislative bodies both at the state and federal levels. It is increasingly evident that state legislatures are taking a more active interest in the operation and management of university systems and individual institutions of public education. The old saying, "No man's life or property are safe when the General Assembly is in session," also applies to public institutions.

Public higher education must develop and reinforce support systems which extend into the areas and groups served. Faculty members must interact with all aspects of the general public to ensure understanding of the role and value of higher education. This may mean climbing down from the "Ivory Tower" and getting more deeply involved in real world enterprises. There are numerous misunderstandings of higher education and those involved (i.e., 'Everyone knows' college teachers only work twelve hours a week). Building support after the institution has been attacked is often very difficult.

While faculty must learn to be more politically involved, it must be in a way that avoids partisan commitments. One of the problems which clouded the effort to have the Master of School Administration approved at Appalachian was the institution's previous high visibility profile with the Democratic Party. Public institutions must operate in a politically apolitical fashion.

"It ain't over till it's over," as stated by Yogi Berra, is a good summary of the effort to regain the authorization to offer school administration programs at Appalachian. The efforts of informed, committed supporters can and has made a difference. It is a wonderful feeling to be successful, but the success itself imposes new responsibilities and challenges.

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